

It's just a few weeks since the start of 2020, and very soon after that the Lunar New Year.

by Adj Asst Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 27th Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

And what a new year this had been! We had ruminations of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in early January. What a 2020 this has been.

The world has gone into crisis mode, what with worldwide shortages of masks and hand sanitizers, even our "troops" on the ground are having challenges getting their personal protective equipment. Lines outside pharmacies waiting for masks....

Thankfully we have the gift of hindsight. SARS in 2003 and H1N1 in 2009 taught us many valuable lessons. MOH engaged with our primary care doctors and established pandemic preparedness clinics. We have the reassurance that MOH will support us when the need arises.

Primary care physicians, both public and private, are the bedrock of our healthcare system. As the foot soldiers of our healthcare system, we make the difference by being there for our people, for our community, for our nation.

We were not prepared for SARS. It was a totally new phenomenon that took all of us by surprise. When 2009 came along, we were better prepared. Many of us had signed up to be pandemic prepared, and we had the reassurance that the Ministry of Health would be supporting us.

Fast forward to 2020, and we now have COVID-19. The world is in lockdown mode, and many airlines have canceled their flights to China. Many countries have barred entry or

even transit for visitors who had been in mainland China in the previous 14 days. The United States of America temporarily banned entry for all foreign nationals who had travelled to China in the previous 2 weeks. US nationals who returned from Hubei Province were placed into mandatory 14-day quarantines. Australia and Israel soon followed suit with similar restrictions. In Singapore, these measures kicked in at 2359 hours on 1st February 2020.

Those of us on the ground have been doing the best we can. As the situation evolves we have had to manage the best we can. Thankfully MOH has been reaching out to the College and SMA; together, we helped to distribute masks to our colleagues over the New Year weekend. That brought much relief to many of our beleaguered brethren. These masks were made available to us by MOH, and for this we are grateful. For our GPs and FPs serving in the frontlines, we need resupply, and having this will give us the confidence to carry on the good fight.

The situation on the ground is constantly evolving. We have been informed that we have a small cluster of locally transmitted cases related to overseas visitors. Admirably, our leadership has demonstrated immense candor and transparency, and this has tremendously to mitigate against the propagation of myths and mistruths. We may well have to ride through this for extended period of time. Together, in close partnership, we must help each other through this challenging time, and keep our morale high. And in this way we can show the world that we are a force to be reckoned with and can prevail against all odds.

■ CM

Travel Photography Interview with Dr Robin Yong

Interviewed by Dr Tan Li Wen Terence,
Editorial Board Member

Robin Yong is a multi-award winning Travel and Commercial Photographer, trained by famous American photographer Jim Zuckerman, the world famous Venetian Masks Florine Houee and Danielle Massart, and legendary Hollywood photographer Greg Gorman. He enjoys traveling to exotic destinations to befriend and photograph the locals. He is best known for his work on the Omo Valley tribes in Ethiopia, the Venetian Masked models in Venice, the Bokator boxers of Cambodia and the Maikos of Kyoto. He calls these works his Travel Portraits, his Art of Travel Medicine. For most of his works, he does not use flash, reflectors or artificial lighting, depending solely on natural lighting alone. The photos are often dramatic, colourful and extremely beautiful. For Robin, every photo must look like a movie poster...



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College Mirror (CM):
What drew you to photography in the first place?

Dr Robin Yong (RY):
I started shooting in 2014. I have long wanted to see the Venetian Masked costumers but did not know where to find them. I have been to Venice before and have asked the locals, but few could tell me exactly where, except that they tend to gather around San Marco's Square during Carnevale period.

I was looking through Venice Carnevale-themed tours online and asked many travel agents, but none could give me the answers I wanted. One day, I thought to myself, hey, maybe a photo workshop might have them, even if they couldn't give me a real one, I'd be happy to have a mock one.

I remember it was 2014 then, just 1 week before the Venice Carnevale, I was looking up photo workshops and found a few. But timing is real tight and most of them were be sold out. I saw one photographer whose work I liked very much - Jim Zuckerman and even though his Venice Carnivale workshop says "sold out" I decided to email him. Jim replied quickly and asked me to give him a few hours to see if the hotel has a vacant room. Luck was on my side and within a week, I found myself traveling to Venice.

There's one big problem, though. I didn't have a camera; I am not a photographer, and I came to Venice just for fun. I grabbed my suit and stage cloak (these later became my costumes for my souvenir photos with

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the Masks) and headed over to Venice. I took with me 2 little point-and-shoot cameras - the type that ladies keep in their handbags. Venice is pure magic during Carnevale period. In no time, I was hooked onto photography. I got along well with the Masked costumers and thereafter, the Venice Carnevale became an annual affair for me.

2016 became the first time I used a DSLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) camera, so that's when I start to get a bit more serious with photography.

Jim became my first photography teacher - and he told me that a good photo always needed to have "drama". I never forget that.

Thereafter, Jim introduced me to my 2nd photography teacher Florine Houee, who happens to be his favourite muse and with Florine, came Danielle Massart, another Venetian Mask.

Later on, I trained under Hollywood photographer Greg Gorman (yes, the man that made the photos for movie posters like Pirates of the Caribbean, Transformers, Joe Black, The Man in the Iron Mask, etc). So yes, I do some shoots for upcoming models and celebrities as well and I get quite a few photo requests from budding models every week.

CM:
What are some of the unique challenges of travel photography?

RY:
There are many forms of travel photography - wildlife, birds, people and culture, street, architecture and landscape. Each have their own unique challenges. I suppose you will need different types of gear or lenses, depending on what you are photographing. You probably need a huge heavy lens for things like wildlife and birds, versus fixed portrait lenses

for things like portraits of people. Wide-angled lenses are probably useful for things like architecture and landscape. Most of the time, you need to time your shooting hours according to your subjects - for example, waking



up real early in the mornings and climbing mountains in the dark just to get the best sunrise shoots, or timing your photography shoots during various festival periods (for shooting people and culture).

Most of the time, travel photography is not well-paid if you only rely on magazine assignments or sale of stock photos. A few people can make quite a lot of money running travel workshops though, although you need to keep coming up with new ideas/ venues that your clients will like.

For me, my kind of travel photography is usually portraits and I do people that belong to associations - Venetian Masks, Ballet dancers, Geishas, Noh actors etc. That is why it involves a lot of pre-planning and discussions with people within the associations.

CM:
Currently, digital photography is very popular, do you see a future for film photography?

RY:
Film is always a classic, but because it is more difficult and time consuming,

it will only serve a special group of photographers.

CM:
I understand you travel a lot for your work, how does that affect your practice?

RY:
I do mainly part-time/ locum work these days, so I am quite lucky that it doesn't affect my practice much.

CM:
Do you ever look at medical photos and think.... "It could be so much better!"?

RY:
Definitely, there's always room for improvement. I am terrible, but because all my photos are geared towards major competitions and gallery exhibitions, I tend to be very critical of all the photos I see - not just medical photos. First of all, the photo must have an element of drama and impact, then the colours have to match. I am also very particular about things like exposure, blown out areas, highlighted areas etc. After winning close to 750 photo awards and some of the world's biggest international photo contests in just 3 years, I tend to look at things slightly differently...

CM:
What's the best way to improve one's skills in photography?

RY:
Always look at plenty of photographs and photo books of famous photographers, then find a good photography teacher and study under him/ her for a few weeks. It saves a lot of time and energy!

Images courtesy of Dr Robin Yong

■ CM